

Chicago Street roadwork planned next year in Elgin

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Improvements to Civic Center Plaza and the reconstruction of Chicago Street east of downtown are among projects to be funded in Elgin by gambling revenues next year, city officials said.

The city's proceeds from Grand Victoria Casino have been decreasing steadily for about a decade and have leveled off at about \$11 million per year, city officials said. The city plans to spend much of its remaining riverboat fund "cash carry-over," or \$14.3 million, next year, and the remaining \$702,000 in 2019, CFO Deb Nawrocki told the city council Wednesday night.

The work at Civic Center Plaza -- which the city has been patching up for years -- is budgeted at \$2 million. City officials are examining a variety of designs with the goal of creating "a place for people to go," senior management analyst Laura Valdez-Wilson said. The council will view options at a later date, she said.

The nearly \$3 million reconstruction of Chicago Street from Center to Liberty streets will be "a very significant project" to include sewer work, Valdez-Wilson said. The city will be working with the Illinois Department of Transportation to establish a timeline.

The city plans \$4.5 million in work to neighborhood streets and major streets including National Street and South McLean Boulevard. The full list will be announced in the spring.

Absent from the 2018 riverboat budget are neighborhood grant programs for property improvement, which this year amounted to \$83,000, and for multifamily housing deconversion, which this year amounted to \$114,000.

Councilwoman Tish Powell said she'd like to revisit the latter, pointing out a recent community survey showed residents want better code compliance in their neighborhoods.

Riverboat funds also are budgeted in 2018 for \$693,000 in improvements to the traffic signal at McLean Boulevard and Big Timber Road, and \$669,000 for a new bike route on the west side, a project mostly funded by a grant via the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Environmental remediation work, estimated at \$1.3 million, will continue on land along the Fox River, north of Gail Borden Public Library.

The casino has infused about \$400 million into the city since it opened in 1995. Revenues hit a high of \$29.5 million in 2001.

"It has provided the city of Elgin with a lot of money to be able to reinvest in the community and do a lot of wonderful things," Valdez-Wilson said.

Funding for vehicle replacement, traffic signal upgrades, youth sports grants, the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce, bridge work, tree replacement and more shifts to the general fund in 2019, city officials said.

Elgin is planning to boost revenues by \$4.2 million next year with a new gasoline tax and increases to sales and hotel/motel taxes. It also wants to cut \$1 million from expenses, mainly in firefighters' overtime costs. The proposed 2018 budget is \$258 million; approval is expected next month.